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SUBJECT: AMB. RICE'S LUNCH WITH THE UN SENIOR AFRICANS GROUP

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ibrahim Gambari, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General, welcomed Amb. Rice as guest of honor at the annual lunch of the UN Senior Africans Group on April 16. Gambari invited Amb. Rice to take advantage of the resources of the group, which brings ambassadors from African missions together with high-level African officials from the Secretariat, UN funds and programs, the ACABQ, and the International Civil Service Commission to advocate for African interests in the areas of policy, programs and personnel. He and other members present asked for U.S. support to African efforts to advance peace and security policy, promote development, and ensure equitable representation of Africans in the UN personnel system. Gambari promised to present Amb. Rice with a more detailed agenda for the group's engagement with the U.S. after discussion at the group's May retreat. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Members of the UN Senior Africans Group hosted Amb. Rice as guest of honor at their annual lunch on April 16 and stated their willingness for reinvigorated engagement with the U.S. In opening remarks, Gambari noted the commitment of Amb. Rice and President Obama to U.S.-African relations, while Dr. Djibril Diallo, Senior Advisor at UNAIDS and the group's coordinator, praised Rice for reaching out to African PermReps by hosting them at her first official reception and for being a "voice for the voiceless" in her previous role as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. Ambassador Rice outlined a U.S. vision of a peaceful, democratic Africa that could fulfill the continent's extraordinary potential, and said that she looked forward to working with the group on its focus areas of policy, programs and personnel.

Policy

¶3. (SBU) Gambari opened the policy discussion by offering the group's far-reaching expertise as a resource should Amb. Rice need quiet advice or research from within the UN system. South African PermRep Baso Sangqu and AU Permanent Observer Ratsifandrihamanana pressed Amb. Rice to take a new look at UN financial support to AU peacekeeping in the wake of the Prodi Report and the AU's increased willingness to take on responsibility in places like Somalia. Tanzanian Ambassador Mahiga advocated a strategic partnership between the U.S. and Africa to deal with terrorism, piracy, and development -- on the latter issue by working to preserve progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in a time of financial crisis.

¶4. (SBU) Haile Menkerios, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs said a growing trust deficit between African countries and the UN had led many Africans to see the Security Council as a vehicle for national agendas rather than a forum for resolving international conflicts. This trust deficit had eroded the SC's legitimacy, he said, and given rise to calls for "African solutions for African problems," in which the UN and other international actors were relegated to a supporting role as donors. He cited the rising political profile of ASEAN as another instance of a regional organization gaining prominence in resolving

regional disputes due to a lack of confidence in the UN. Menkerios said that this trend was not constructive, and that SC members should counteract it by looking beyond national interest to set an agenda of resolving common concerns that would help repair the Council's reputation.

¶15. (SBU) Cheikh Sidi Diarra, Under Secretary-General and High Representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (UN-OHRLLS), seconded the call for U.S. commitment to continue to work towards MDGs, particularly in three development areas that he said were notable for their potential security implications: fighting abject poverty, eradicating communicable diseases and addressing climate change.

¶16. (SBU) Amb. Rice thanked participants for their comments, and said that the nexus of security and development had been an important focus of her work before joining the administration. She quoted President Obama, saying that Millennium Development Goals were the U.S.'s goals as well, and mentioned the president's budget requests for sufficient funds to pay down U.S. UN arrears, \$448 million for emergency aid to the world's poorest and most vulnerable due to the financial crisis, and \$1.1 billion for food security. Amb. Rice acknowledged that UN support to regional peacekeeping was an important subject for debate, but said the administration would need to move cautiously to ensure that support to peacekeeping missions in places such as Somalia did not endanger Congressional support for UN peacekeeping generally.

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Programs

¶17. (SBU) The two participants from the Administrative Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), Nonye Udo and Colleen Kelapile, made a strong pitch for preserving UN programs on Africa in a difficult budgetary environment. They said that during the last budget session an attempt had been made to consolidate Africa-specific programs, such as the UN's Economic Commission for Africa, into larger programs focusing on developing countries worldwide. African countries and the Senior Africans Group felt strongly that such bodies should maintain an "African identity" and had fought successfully to keep them: this year a similar fight was likely, and the U.S. position would be key. They also raised the issue of scale of assessments, noting that the ceiling for the U.S. contribution had been lowered from 25 to 22 percent. Many developing countries were hoping that the U.S. would accept a return to a ceiling of 25 percent, they said.

¶18. (SBU) Eleviome Eloho Otobo of the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office made a pitch for increased U.S. engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). He said that the U.S. was alone among P5 nations in not having made a contribution to the Peacebuilding Fund, and that a decision to contribute would be an important symbolic step. Even better would be for the U.S. also to take the chair of the Peacebuilding configuration for one of the two countries likely to be added to the PBC's brief, Guinea or Cote d'Ivoire. While both were Francophone countries, Otobo said that a former U.S. ambassador with Francophone African experience would be a perfect choice as chair. Otobo also asked for U.S. engagement in a more robust discussion on peacebuilding and its implications, including questions of the relationship between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and benchmarks and exit strategies for peacebuilding.

¶19. (SBU) UNICEF's Omar Abdi asked Rice to help continue the agency's momentum in advancing health and agricultural programming. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Special Adviser on Gender, welcomed President Obama's decision on funding maternal

mortality programs and said her office hoped for continued funding for gender programs. Diallo of UNAIDS said that his agency's focus was ensuring universal access to treatment, care, and support, and that he looked to the U.S. to ensure UNAIDS is able to reach those in need.

Personnel

¶10. (SBU) Finally, the Senior Africans Group briefed Amb. Rice on their efforts to ensure equitable representation of Africans within the UN system, particularly at the middle and entry level. African candidates are at a disadvantage, Gambari said, due to "junior professional officer" (JPO) programs funded by developed countries for the benefit of their citizens. As a result, Africans are in danger of becoming "an endangered species" in the UN system, he said. Amb. Rice said that she would be eager to work with the Senior Africans group, African ambassadors and others to address the issue, and asked if group members had considered approaching private foundations to fund similar JPO programs for African candidates, perhaps on a matching basis alongside African states.

¶11. (SBU) Gambari closed the meeting by expressing his hope for a close dialogue and partnership with the U.S. Mission over the years to come. He committed to discussing the issues covered in the lunch in more detail during the UN Senior Africans Group's May retreat, after which he would present Amb. Rice with a more formal agenda of areas on which the group hoped to cooperate.

Rice